



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



TRIBAL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS ADVOCATE FOR NATIVE VETERANS HOME OWNERSHIP



SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman and Tribal VSOs Orlando Morrison (Rosebud Sioux Tribe), Geri Opsal (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), Manaja Hill (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe), and Robert Dunsmore (Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe) participated in the American Indian Housing Symposium in Rapid City last week.

This group has been serving on committees of the South Dakota Native Homeownership Coalition for the

past two years, focusing on such issues as land, infrastructure, funding, financing, credit scores, down payments, closing costs, contractors, and home loans.

Recognizing that the lack of housing supply is a real barrier to homeownership in Native communities, the Coalition is working hard to support local contractors and encourage them to build more homes. The Coalition relaunched a pilot internship program to place building trades students from Oglala Lakota College with local contractors. Through the program, students on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River Reservations gained valuable hands-on construction experience, while contractors had the chance to test out potential employees in a risk-free setting.

Based on input from interns, contractors, and partners, the program was a huge success; of the 11 students who completed the internship, nine received job offers from their contractors. Building on this success, they plan to expand to additional tribal communities in summer 2018.

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VA AND SBA TEAM UP TO HELP VETERAN ENTREPRENEURS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is working with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide education and support to disabled veterans interested in self-employment.

The VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) entered into an agreement with the SBA Office of Veterans Business Development in early December to provide self-employment guidance, assistance and on-the-job training to disabled Veterans.

"Our partnership with the Small Business Administration brings together the best of public and private business resources to help disabled veterans start their business on a firm footing," said VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This program is available to veterans who want to transition to self-employment and want the guidance and mentorship provided by SBA partners to increase their success."

To qualify for the program, veterans must meet three conditions: a service-connected disability, an employment handicap and acceptance into the VR&E program.

SBA partners include Service Corps of Retired Executives, Small Business Development Centers, Veterans Business Outreach Centers, Women's Business Centers and U.S. Export Assistance Centers.

The VA-SBA memorandum of agreement formalizes a working relationship that has been in place for many years. Hundreds of disabled Veterans have worked with SBA partners to establish and build their businesses.

In some cases, training opportunities are available for veterans to work with existing businesses and gain valuable business skills through the Non-Paid Work Experience program. This program is similar to an internship, and participants receive a monthly VR&E housing allowance.

VR&E assists veterans with service-connected disabilities to find and maintain suitable employment in meaningful careers. For veterans with service-connected disabilities that are so severe that they cannot immediately consider work, VR&E provides services to improve their ability to live as independently as possible.

VR&E employs nearly 1,000 professional vocational rehabilitation counselors and delivers services through a network of nearly 350 office locations. For more information on the VR&E programs go to <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/>.



MEDICARE CARDS ARE IN

Bob Patterson, Social Security Acting Associate Commissioner, reports that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) have started to mail new Medicare cards to beneficiaries.

Instead of a Social Security Number (SSN), the new cards will have a Medicare number that's unique to each beneficiary. The new card will help protect identities and secure personal information. Medicare coverage and benefits will stay the same.

Medicare will automatically mail new cards at no cost to the address on file at Social Security. So please make sure the address of anyone you're helping is up-to-date. An address can be updated easily by using [my Social Security](#).

As Medicare beneficiaries begin to receive their replacement cards, please share these three tips with them. Once they get their New Medicare card, destroy the old Medicare card and start using the new one right away. Don't just throw the old card away—shred it or cut it into small pieces.

1. Doctors, other health care providers, and plans approved by Medicare know that Medicare is replacing old cards.

They're ready to accept the new card.

2. They should be aware of anyone contacting them about their new Medicare card and asking for their Medicare number, personal information, or to pay

a fee for their new card. They should treat the Medicare number like they treat their Social Security or credit card numbers.

Remember, they don't need to do anything to get the new card. Medicare will never contact them uninvited to ask for their personal information.

In addition, just last month Social Security started removing the SSN from many of its notices and forms to prevent fraud, fight identity theft, and safeguard taxpayer dollars. These communications also include benefit-verification notices, Social Security post-entitlement notices, and certain documents sent to appointed representatives. The benefit-verification letter includes the recipient's name and address. The SSN isn't intended to serve as identification, nor should it be used as such by third parties.

The image is a composite of two parts. On the left is a dark blue sign with white text that reads: "New Medicare cards are in the mail". Below this, it says "Get an email when your card is in the mail" and provides a text input field labeled "Type your email here" and a dropdown menu labeled "Select your state" with a "Submit" button. On the right is a sample of the new Medicare card. At the top, it says "Your new card will have a new Medicare Number that's unique to you, instead of your Social Security Number. This will help to protect your identity." Below this, it says "YOUR NEW CARD WILL LOOK LIKE THIS:". The card itself has a blue header with the Medicare logo and "MEDICARE HEALTH INSURANCE". The cardholder's name is "JOHN L SMITH". The Medicare Number is "1EG4-TE5-MK72". It lists "HOSPITAL (PART A)" and "MEDICAL (PART B)" with coverage start dates of "03-01-2016". A large "SAMPLE" watermark is overlaid on the card.

VA OFFERS FASTER CLAIMS DECISION REVIEW PROCESS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it is offering two opportunities for early participation in the new, more efficient claims decision review process outlined in the historic Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017.

These two opportunities will allow eligible veterans to receive a review of a decision on a claim much faster than the current appeals process.

“The VA is committed to transforming the appeals process,” said VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This is evidenced by the success of Rapid Appeals Modernization Program which has seen over 12,000 veterans opt-in. In addition, the Board of Veterans’ Appeals has issued approximately 46,000 decisions this fiscal year — nearly 23,000 more decisions than last year at this time. We are on pace to reach a historical fiscal goal of 81,000 decisions.”

First, the VA will expand the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) by removing the requirement that veterans first receive an invitation from the VA in order to elect participation in the program.

RAMP, which was initially launched in November 2017 as an invitation only program, allows eligible veterans with a disability compensation appeal early access to the Higher-Level Review and Supplemental Claim Lanes outlined in the Appeals Modernization Act. By removing the invitation requirement, veterans will have the opportunity to benefit from the new, more efficient decision review process, versus continuing to wait in the legacy appeal process. As of March 31, RAMP reviews were completed in an average of 52 days.

Second, in May, the Board of Veterans’ Appeals will launch its Early Applicability of Appeals Modernization (BEAAM) pilot project. Under this project, the Board will partner with the National Organization of Veterans’ Advocates, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the California Department of Veterans Affairs to identify 50 veterans who are dissatisfied with a recent decision on their benefits claim.

These veterans will participate in a study that allows them the option of appealing directly to the Board or seeking a review in RAMP. In this study, the Board will collect preliminary data about veteran choices and experiences.

In October, the Board will begin deciding appeals from RAMP decisions using the features of the Appeals Modernization Act, specifically its new, separate Direct, Evidence and Hearing dockets.

The expansion of RAMP, combined with the BEAAM, will allow VA to collect valuable data about implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act.



STATE EMPLOYS 1,181 VETERANS

SDDVA has been working with the Bureau of Human Resources to obtain quarterly numbers for the number of veterans employed by the State of South Dakota. One facet of the numbers we were receiving was minus the Board of Regents. However, we recently were able to obtain those numbers.

Information we received indicates 14,246 employees currently employed by the state and 1,181 of those are veterans (8.29 percent). Census numbers show that South Dakota's current population is 877,790 and the VA reports that South Dakota currently has 65,893 veterans, so approximately 7.5 percent of South Dakota's population are veterans.

HB 5674—THE VA MISSION ACT

Statement by Acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie re Committee Approval of H.R. 5674, the VA MISSION Act

I commend Chairman Roe and the House Veterans' Affairs Committee for approving the VA MISSION Act and sending it to the full House for a vote.

As White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders said yesterday, the bill "will transform the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) into a modern, high-performing, and integrated healthcare system that will ensure our veterans receive the best healthcare possible from the VA, whether delivered in the VA's own facilities or in the community."

With funding for the Choice Program set to run out as early as May 31, veterans are counting on Congress to approve this vital legislation by Memorial Day and send it to President Trump, who has said he will sign it immediately.

As I've underscored before, our veterans deserve no less, and I will continue to work with House and Senate leaders to make this happen by then.



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

Follow



This spring marks 4yrs since the Phoenix VA crisis. We won't forget what happened to our GREAT VETS. Choice is vital, but the program needs work & is running out of \$. Congress must fix Choice Program by Memorial Day so VETS can get the care they deserve. I will sign immediately!

9:49 AM - 3 May 2018

17,584 Retweets 75,324 Likes



VABHHCS HEALTH AND BENEFITS FAIR

The VA Black Hills Health Care System (VABHHCS), Dakotas VA Regional Office, and the Black Hills National Cemetery will host an informational fair and benefits clinic on Thursday, May 17, 2018, from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm (MT) at the VFW Post 1273 (420 Main Street) in Rapid City. VA staff will be available to answer questions, take concerns, and provide immediate assistance to veterans and their families.



VABHHCS will provide information and demonstrate a variety of health care therapies as part of the VA's Whole Health program. These include Tai Chi, Yoga,

Mindfulness, Health Coaching and many more complimentary treatment therapies for pain management, weight loss, tobacco cessation, and emotional wellness. Staff will demonstrate new smart phone applications and innovative technologies that allow veterans to monitor and control their own health goals along with connecting to their provider over secure systems.

"Telehealth is opening up access for veterans to quickly and easily connect with their health care providers. More

veterans are using this new technology to get the help they need faster and often more conveniently than driving to one of our facilities," said Teresa Forbes, Public Affairs Officer.

VA representatives will be available to discuss both claims for compensation benefits and enrollment and eligibility in health care. VBA will have secure electronic access to your benefit records and can answer questions on compensation claims.

Black Hills National Cemetery staff will answer questions about eligibility for burial benefits and planning options.

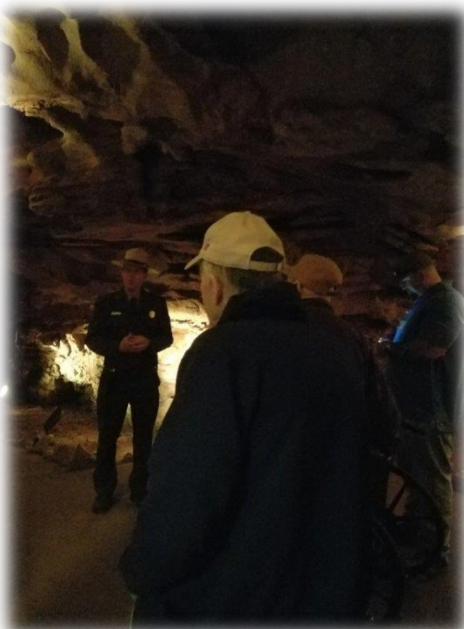
All Veterans and their families are welcome to stop by at any time between 3:00 pm and 4:30 pm on Thursday, May 17, 2018.



SPRING IS IN THE AIR AT THE STATE VETERANS HOME

Spring has finally sprung here at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home! Our heroes have been hitting the road and enjoying some outside time. Trips to the BBQ spit for roasted marshmallows and smores, a tour of Wind Cave, lunch at the lake, and some fishing.

These heroes also took some time out of their busy schedule to participate in the Head Line News Salute to Troops. Every hour between 6:00 am and noon (ET) HLN sends out salutes to servicemembers everywhere.



SD SOLDIERS RECEIVE CITIZENSHIP AWARD FOR HONORABLE ACTIONS

Three South Dakota Army National Guard Soldiers received the Outstanding Citizen Award by the Sioux Falls Police Department at the Law Enforcement Center in Sioux Falls, April 26.

Sgt. 1st Class Neal Stratman, 2nd Battalion, 196th Regional Training Institute, Sgt. 1st Class Matt Tjaden, 1742nd Transportation Company, and Capt. Carl Stearns, 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, received the award from Police Chief Matt Burns, Sioux Falls Police Department, for their honorable actions on March 7.

The three soldiers were traveling home after work when they witnessed a two-vehicle car collision on West 60th Street North, which resulted in one person being critically injured and two others with minor injuries.

"We immediately stopped to provide assistance to the passengers of the two highly damaged vehicles," said Stearns. "The two vehicles had been traveling in opposite directions and collided at an estimated combined speed of 100 mph (50 mph speed zone)."

Stearns immediately called 911 while Stratman began to assess the collision and Tjaden conducted traffic control.

"I just saw a bunch of snow flying and the cars in the ditch," said Stratman. "We noticed there were three people from the two vehicles and the original seat for one passenger was now only half the size."

The drivers of both vehicles were male and had minor injuries, but the wife of one driver was trapped in the passenger seat and unconscious upon arrival.

"The husband appeared to have a concussion but refused to let us assist him," said Stearns. "He was an off duty police officer and wanted us to help his wife first."

Stearns went to his vehicle and retrieved his personal first aid bag and a blanket while Stratman grabbed a towel from his vehicle.

"Stratman turned his towel into a make-shift brace to stabilize her neck and we wrapped her in the blanket to keep her warm until the fire department and ambulance services arrived on scene," said Stearns. "She was suffering from what appeared to be an extreme internal head injury which caused her to have seizures for several minutes."

Tjaden was slowing down vehicles on the street and directing them away from the collision until the first responders arrived.



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SDNG SOLDIERS RECOGNIZED

(CONTINUED)

"60th Street is one of the busiest streets in Sioux Falls during rush hour traffic and there was black ice on the road that day," said Stratman. "If he wouldn't have done that, it could've been a lot worse - it was huge."

When the first responders arrived, Stratman continued to assist as much as possible.

"He turned his attention to comforting the husband and gave him his own jacket in order for him to stay warm,"

said Stearns.

"He engaged him in

conversation to keep him calm until his wife was ultimately extricated from the vehicle with the Jaws of Life."

The injured were transported to the Sanford Medical Center in Sioux Falls for medical treatment.

"The best part is knowing we helped those people," said Stratman. "It's been very humbling to receive this award and for my stepsons to see what kind of impact we can

have in our community."

The Outstanding Citizen Award is given to those who demonstrate loyalty, dedication, attitude and integrity, as well as exemplary service, to their community.

"I was truly proud to see these two noncommissioned officers work as a team," said Stearns. "It was so amazing to see how other people just stood around at the scene and waited to take direction from the Guard Soldiers in uniform."



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Neal Stratman, receives the Outstanding Citizen Award by Sioux Falls Police Chief Matt Burns



U.S. Army Capt. Carl Stearns, receives the Outstanding Citizen Award by Sioux Falls Police Chief Matt Burns



U.S. Army Sgt. 1st Class Matt Tjaden, receives the Outstanding Citizen Award by Sioux Falls Police Chief Matt Burns

CROYMANS NAMED NEW ARMY GUARD ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL

Brig. Gen. Thomas Croymans is the new assistant adjutant general for the South Dakota Army National Guard.

A transfer of authority ceremony took place between Croymans and the outgoing assistant adjutant general, Brig. Gen. Kevin Griese, at the Joint Force Headquarters Readiness Center on Camp Rapid, May 6.

As the assistant adjutant general, Croymans is responsible to the South Dakota National Guard's Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, for strategic planning, strength management, troop readiness and mobilization support of the state's nearly 3,200 Army National Guard Soldiers. Croymans, of Aberdeen, replaces Griese, of Pierre, who served in the position since July 2013.

"Brig. Gen. Griese has done a truly fantastic job leading the Army National Guard for almost five years," said Reisch. "I can't thank him enough for his dedication and hard work. Brig. Gen. Croymans is absolutely ready for this key assignment and I am confident he will continue to push the Army Guard to new heights."

"It's truly an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to serve this great organization and the best soldiers in the entire Army National Guard," Croymans said. "It's been quite a journey from being the dispatcher at the 740th (Transportation Company) in Milbank to the assistant adjutant general in Rapid City. As each new assignment and opportunity came along, I always made it my goal to improve my skills and abilities as a Soldier and a leader in order to contribute to my unit and my organization. That philosophy has not changed."

Croymans began his military career in October 1975 enlisting in the 740th Transportation Company in Milbank. He spent the first 14 years of his career as an enlisted soldier – attaining the rank of staff sergeant. He received his commission as a second lieutenant through the South Dakota Military Academy Officer Candidate School in December 1989 and was assigned as a transportation officer.

He has held various command and staff positions to include commander of the 1742nd Transportation Company, 88th Troop Command, 139th Brigade Support Battalion and 109th Regional Support Group. At the state headquarters level, Croymans served as the chief of staff, director of the joint staff and most recently as the land component commander.

(continued)



CROYMANS (CONTINUED)

Croymans has a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from South Dakota State University and a Masters in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

"I'm looking forward to working closely with the staff at JFHQ, and the leadership in the field, to develop strategies and policies that enhance readiness, provide opportunity and positively affect the culture," Croymans said. "Further, I look forward to getting out and visiting with Soldiers, observing training and doing everything in my power to ensure that our Soldiers and families are cared for and ready."

In his civilian career, Croymans is the regional roads engineer for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Great Plains Region.

"I look forward to the challenges and increased responsibility of being the ATAG and at the same time, am excited about the future," Croymans said.



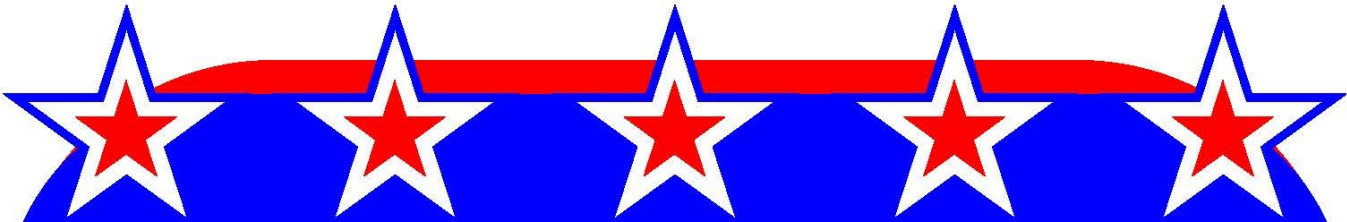
MINNEHAHA WORLD WAR II VETERANS HONORED

Tom Sparrow, Turner County Veterans Service Officer, worked with leadership at VFW Post 628 in Sioux Falls to identify World War II Veterans in the Sioux Falls area and coordinated an event to honor them.

SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman and Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard attended the honoring ceremony and presented these heroes with the South Dakota WW II medal.

Special thanks for Mr. Sparrow for reaching out and locating these heroes.





Sioux Falls VA Medical Center
2501 W. 22nd St. , Sioux Falls
May 17, 2018, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

OPEN HOUSE

- Tour new Oncology & Specialty Medicine additions
- Attend the dedication of the Missing Man Table & Chair and quilts to honor Vietnam Veterans (4:15 p.m.)
- Visit the benefits expo in the front foyer for information about VA eligibility, care and benefits
- Learn more about how VA research benefits Veterans and others
- Enjoy refreshments furnished by Veterans Canteen Service

QUESTIONS, PLEASE CALL 605-333-6889



UPCOMING EVENTS

May 11—AHEC Improving Veterans Care Conference—University Center—Sioux Falls
May 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)
May 17—SFVAHCS Open House - 4:00 pm—6:00 pm (CT)
May 19—MOPH State Convention—DAV Headquarters in Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
May 19—Armed Forces Day Spring Fling—VFW Post #3442 (721 Mt Rushmore Rd) Custer (Noon—11:00 pm (MT)
May 22—SDDVA Mini Conference via Skype—10:00 am (CT)
May 24-25—PVA Disabled Veterans Fishing Tournament—Chamberlain
Jun 7-10—American Legion State Convention—Spearfish
Jun 14-17—VFW State Convention—Sioux Falls
July 4—Independence Day
Jul 7—Veterans for Veterans Annual Poker Run—Mitchell Depot—1:00 pm (CT)
Jul 11—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
Jul 12—Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Cemetery Grand Opening—Sisseton—11:00 am (CT)
Jul 13 —VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Education Classroom—Fort Meade—10:00 am (MT)
Jul 14-17—DAV National Convention—Reno, NV
Jul 21-25—VFW National Convention—Kansas City, MO
Jul 26—VABHHCS Veterans Town Hall—Post 8 American Legion—Pierre
Aug 20-24—SDDVA Benefits School—Ramkota—Pierre
Aug 24-30—American Legion National Convention—Minneapolis, MN
Sept 14—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—Soldiers and Sailors Building—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)
Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)



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